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In Sunshine or In Shadow

Chapter One

"It's a little awkward," Keiran said, and his gaze — a green that was almost gray — dropped suddenly to the little bowl of peanuts on the table between them. His blond eyebrows knitted together in a little scowl; very important to select exactly the right peanut, apparently.

Rick's mouth quirked indulgently. They'd been partnered in Homicide for nearly five years, and he could be forgiven for thinking he knew Keir pretty well by now. One of the things he knew was that Keir preferred whole peanuts; he had an annoying habit of cherry picking the perfect peanuts out of any dish. Another thing Rick knew was that Keir had a tendency to over-think things. Not in the field, fortunately. Nothing wrong with Keir's instincts or reflexes, but get three beers in him and he started brooding, and next thing you knew, he was spouting stuff from some half-forgotten philosophy course he'd taken in college.

Five years was a long time. Rick knew plenty of marriages that hadn't lasted five years.

"So?" he raised his mug, swallowed, watching Keir over the rim.

Keir's mouth curled derisively, and he picked out a peanut and tossed it in his mouth, crunching irritably, like he'd caught the peanut in a moving violation.

"It's just that I've been thinking..."

"I warned you about that."

Keir's smile was mostly perfunctory twitch.

Rick drained his mug and rose. "Want another?" It was Friday night. After two brutal weeks, they finally had a weekend off, and they were on home turf — a cop bar in Van Nuys. Decent selection on tap, plenty of Stones on the jukebox, and the knowledge they could let down their guard because pretty much everyone in the place was law enforcement or ex-law enforcement. Home sweet home.

Keir was staring up at Rick with a strange, disconcerted expression. He shook his head, and Rick moved to the bar. The memory of Keir's expression stayed with him — like an irritating finger tapping his shoulder.

At the bar he ordered two Harps, chatted with Bill Suzuki also from Homicide, and unobtrusively watched his partner.

"Good going with the collar on the Martinez case," Suzuki congratulated.

"Yeah. It's a pleasure putting that scumball, Olmos, behind bars."

"What's eating Quinn?"

"Nothing." Rick said it curtly, discouraging further discussion on the topic of his partner. He couldn't help glancing Keir's way again.

Keir was staring at nothing and chewing his bottom lip, a sure sign he was edgy. What now for chrissake? It had been a good week. For once the bad guys were not swaggering

away untouched, and tomorrow Keir was starting two weeks of well-deserved vacation. So what was there to bug him? Rick sighed inwardly. He was undoubtedly going to hear all about it when he got back to the table.

If anyone should be feeling out of sorts it was him. This was the first vacation they'd taken apart in...three years. Keir had just announced it the previous week — right out of the blue. No warning, no discussion. Not that he had to talk his vacation plans over with Rick, but...they were best friends in addition to partners, and they usually did spend a portion of their off-time together — being the only two gay cops in Homicide gave them a natural bond.

He collected the sweating bottles and carried them back to the table, hooking the chair with his foot and sitting down. Keir jumped as though he'd been miles away, and Rick studied him before turning his attention to topping off Keir's half-empty mug.

"So you've been thinking," he prompted.

Keir stared at him blankly before registering Rick's reference to earlier. His expression changed — Rick couldn't read it at all, and that gave him an uneasy feeling. What the hell was going on?

Now that he thought about it, Keir had been acting weird for a couple of weeks. Since the Martinez case had been dropped in their laps. No wonder. Nobody enjoyed it when a kid was the victim. Even if the kid was a gang banger. Suspected gang banger. Gang bangers had parents too. Well, one usually. Some overworked, out-of-touch woman — but in this case, a nice woman. A woman who loved her kids even if she couldn't control them, didn't begin to understand them — these young, tough, tattooed strangers who lived in her house.

No. The trouble had started before that. Before the Martinez case. Keir had been short tempered, distant, absent-minded — not at all like himself for nearly a month now. And then this sudden vacation.

Rick asked abruptly, "You okay, Quinn? You're not sick or something, are you?"

"Me? I'm fine."

The tone was reassuring enough, but now that Rick examined his partner, he wondered. Keir looked tired. More tired than a Friday night warranted. And he'd lost weight recently — even for his normal wiry self. There were shadows under his eyes and it seemed a long time since that full mouth had smiled.

Full mouth. Yeah. Keir had a very nice mouth. He tasted nice too. Funny how people had their own taste...

And no way was Rick letting his thoughts stray in that direction. They'd already tried that and it had been a mutually agreed upon disaster.

"You'd tell me if something was wrong, right?"

Keir reached for his mug and said, "Right."

Rick picked his own mug up, tilted it, pouring beer against the side of the glass. He nearly dropped the bottle as Keir said, "I'm resigning."

"You're..."

"Resigning. I have resigned, in fact."

"Why?"

Keir shook his head — like it was too complicated to explain?

Rick gave him an easier question. "When?"

"Last week."

"Last week? And you're telling me now?"

"I told Captain Friedman I'd think it over for a week."

Rick stared at him, then gave a disbelieving laugh. "You're kidding me, right?"

Stone-faced, Keir stared right back.

"What the hell's going on? You can't quit."

Unbelievably, Keir laughed. "Want to bet?"

"You resign and then you go on vacation?" It felt safer to give way to indignation on this score; Rick was still trying to assimilate the other.

"Hey, I'm entitled to my vacation."

"I don't believe this."

"I'm sorry —"

"Sorry? You didn't even discuss it with me."

Keir was giving him a strange look. "It's my decision to make."

"You're going to pretend this doesn't affect me? We're partners. We were." Rick kept his voice low although — shock wearing off — he was getting angry.

"I know that. I'm telling you now. Before anyone else —"

"Gee, thanks! I feel better already."

Keir sighed. "Listen, I know you're pissed. When I get back I still have two weeks. We can talk then."

"Talk? I don't want to talk." I want you to un-resign, that's what Rick meant. But Keir was looking at him as though this just confirmed a much-contested point. What point? What the hell was going on?

"Then we won't talk," Keir said evenly. "Either way, I don't give a shit."

What. The. Hell?

And now Rick was angry. Hurt and angry. "What does that mean, you don't give a shit? What am I supposed to make of that? What the fuck's going on with you?"

But Keir glanced at his watch and was already on his feet. "I've got a plane to catch. I'll see you in two weeks."

He turned away, and Rick rose too and grabbed his arm. Keir stood perfectly still. They were the same height, but Rick was broader, bigger. He was by nature cool and low key, relying on his build and obvious strength to get his point across to perps. Keir relied on the force of his personality — which was considerable. Especially after five years of it.

Rick let go of Keir's arm. He said, surprised to hear how aggrieved he sounded, "A plane to where? Where the hell are you flying off to?"

"Ireland," Keir replied.

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Rick was very drunk when he phoned.

He'd stayed at O'Mally's after Keir left, joining the crowd at the bar. After closing the place down, he'd had a couple more when he got home. Not the brightest idea he'd had recently. The bed didn't actually levitate, but it was spinning nicely, and — proof of how drunk he was — Rick decided the best way to get his mind off how really awful he was going to feel in the a.m., was to call Keir.

The phone rang once.

"Yep?" Keir sounded perfectly alert for three-thirty — like he was expecting Rick's call. Or maybe he was still packing for this mystery trip to Ireland. Maybe he was on his way out the door.

Ireland?

"Why Ireland?" Rick asked. The bedroom window was open and he could hear the chimes on the front porch tinkling eerily in the summer breeze, the rustle of the old elm tree, the far off roar of traffic on the 405. Even at three-thirty in the morning, the L.A. freeways were busy — people on their way to airports, no doubt.

Keir gave a husky little chuckle. "We talked about Ireland."

Astonishingly, given how much he'd had to drink, Rick's cock twitched into life. It was that throaty bedroom laugh that did it. Bringing back memories of things they'd agreed to forget.

His hand moved. He scratched his belly instead and said, "Two guys named Monaghan and Quinn, I guess that's no surprise."

"No. No surprises," Keir agreed.

"Tonight was a surprise."

Keir seemed to be thinking over Rick's objection. He said finally, "It shouldn't have been."

"What's that supposed to mean?" He could hear the sodden belligerence in his voice. Yeah, he'd had too much to drink, no doubt about it. He wasn't used to it. Didn't like to lose control — and he was losing control, that was obvious.

Keir said levelly — his voice already sounding far away, “It means if this is a surprise to you, you haven’t been listening to me for the last three years.”

“Come off it,” Rick said uncomfortably. He had a sudden vision of Keir in this house...this bedroom...this bed. That lean, muscular brown body leaning over him, the soft gilt fall of hair in those wide green eyes. Smiling eyes. Irish eyes.

It occurred to him that Keir hadn’t answered. He said, striving to move the conversation back into shallow and familiar waters, “I hear the Guinness is like creamy, black silk over there.”

“I’ll have a pint in your honor. Two pints.”

“Cheap bastard. Look...” Rick was nonplussed to hear that tiny fissure of emotion in his voice. “You’re not really going, are you?” And he was aware — and was sure that Keir was also aware — that he was no longer talking about unplanned vacations.

“I am, yeah,” Keir said.

In the silence between them Rick could hear the hiss of static on the line, the music of the chimes. The lilt of bells sounded vaguely Celtic.

In a broad brogue, he said suddenly, briskly, “Two Oirish cops are walking the beat one night after stopping for a wee nip. A severed head comes rolling along the pavement toward them.”

Keir snorted, but said nothing.

Rick said, “Monaghan picks it up, looks it in the eye, and says, Jez, that looks like Murphy. To which Quinn replies, No, Murphy was taller than that!”

“Say goodnight, Dick,” Keir said.

“Goodnight, dick.”

Chapter Two

He'd had some bad ideas in his time, but this was probably the worst: a GLBT singles bus tour through Ireland. And yet it had seemed like such a great notion when he was booking his trip. No need to play down his sexuality, a selection of available men with at least one thing in common — two things, counting Ireland — and someone else to do the driving. But he'd have been happier with a rental car and a map.

To start with, the available men were either too old or too young. And it turned out all Keir had in common with them was the obvious; he'd been out of the civilized mainstream for too long. He didn't know how to talk to anyone who wasn't a cop.

That had been another mistake: revealing what he did for a living. He should have known better. He did know better in real life, but the artificial existence of life on a touring bus had lulled him into uncharacteristic candor. The second night out in Galway he'd confided to Terry Schweitzer over a couple of pints. Terry offered a glazed smile, excused himself early, and by morning it was common knowledge that back home in the good old US of A. Keir Quinn was Detective Keiran Quinn of L.A.P.D. He found himself spending a lot of time with two very nice lesbians from Milwaukee — ex-FBI agents who'd had the survival skills to keep mum about it.

He missed Rick.

He missed Rick even worse than he had imagined he would, and he'd known before he ever started this that it was going to hurt like hell.

He tried not to think about it. No point. Rick was very clear about what he wanted and what he didn't want. He wanted Keir for his work partner and best friend. He didn't want him for his lover or life partner. He didn't want to talk about it. He didn't want to listen to Keir talk about it. As far as Rick was concerned they had tried it and it hadn't worked.

That was the part Keir didn't understand. Because it had worked. They had been good together. It had been comfortable and easy — the sex had been terrific. God, it had been nice to be with someone who knew him as well as Rick did — and accepted him as was. Liked him as was.

But then there had been the thing with the Holland chick. They'd been investigating the supposed suicide of Deanna Holland's boyfriend. Third interview, Holland had freaked and pulled a gun. Keir had moved to disarm her and the gun had gone off leaving a hole in Deanna Holland's ceiling, powder burns and a wrecked relationship for Keir.

"I think we'd better cool it," Rick had said the morning after what turned out to be the best night they'd ever spent together yet. Nothing like a close call to give the fucking a certain intensity. Nothing too kinky, just...well, a little emotional, maybe.

“Why?” Keir had asked.

“It’s getting...too heavy.”

What the hell did that mean? Rick’s hazel eyes met Keir’s impassively.

“Okay,” Keir said, shrugging. “Me first in the shower or you?”

He didn’t think Rick meant it. Or at least...he thought Rick just needed time to work through whatever it was bothering him. But Rick had been serious. No more sleepovers. In fact, no more hanging out together at all for a time — until Rick had started seeing the twink flight attendant from Colorado. Then they’d slowly drifted back to spending off-duty time together.

Gradually it had sunk in on Keir that it really was over. Over for Rick anyway.

Keir had tried, but for him it was like trying to stuff the genie back in the bottle. He couldn’t go back — and apparently he wasn’t going to be allowed to move forward either. The practical thing, the only thing to do, seemed to be to disengage. That was easier said than done. It had taken him four months and Rick dating a handsome, well-to-do West Hollywood veterinarian to make up his mind for him.

Anyway, he didn’t regret his decision, and Ireland was beautiful, it was just that he could have done without the group tour experience. Not that it wasn’t sort of relaxing sitting there on the bus watching the green countryside flash by. Everywhere you looked were the ruins of castles and towers, grazing sheep, old graveyards. They’d yet to pass through a village that, no matter how small, didn’t have at least two pubs, and even the ugly little industrial towns seemed quaint and exotic because it was Ireland.

He just wished Rick were there to share it with him.

He just wished he could stop thinking about Rick.

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The phone rang and rang, and then Rick picked up. “Monaghan.” He sounded curt.

“Top of the morning to you,” Keir drawled. He was lying on the bed in his “posh” hotel room staring up at the pattern cast by moonlight through lace curtains. He wrapped one hand around his cock, stroking leisurely.

“Jeeesus,” Rick said, but Keir could hear the smile in his voice all the way across the Atlantic. “It’s about time you checked in, you asshole. Having fun, I take it?”

“You bet.” Loose limbed, he half-closed his eyes, moving his hand. He imagined it was Rick’s big hand on him....

“What the hell time is it over there?”

Keir made an effort, glanced at the hotel clock. “Late.” Like three a.m. late. Which put it about seven o’clock in the evening in Los Angeles. Rick was probably on his way out. Was he still seeing the veterinarian? Keir’s hand tightened; he pumped himself a little harder, a little

faster. Said breathlessly, "How's tricks?"

"Same old, same old." But Rick promptly launched into a description of his case load. Once it would have been their caseload, but Keir would only have two weeks on the job when he returned, and gradually that awareness tinged Rick's tone and slowed his words until he came to a full and awkward stop.

It was during that pause that sensation shivered through Keir. He bit his lip on the sound threatening to tear out of him, feeling the quicksilver release spill through his fingers, spatter belly and chest.

From a long way away Rick asked — changing the subject, "So how's the Guinness? Did it live up to expectation?"

His pulse was already slowing, his breath evening. Not like the earth had actually moved; just a little tremor. He got out, "Yep. It really is different over here."

"Going to a lot of pubs? Listening to a lot of music, I guess?"

"Yep. We've had a seisiun pretty much every night. It's great. You'd have loved it."

"Yeah. Well."

Keir opened his mouth but found nothing to say. No. Wrong. There was too much to say. And even if he knew where to start, what was the use? One thing about Rick: he knew his own mind.

Instead, he tried to move the conversation back to shop talk. Rick interrupted him to say, "Was it the Martinez case? Is that why you're resigning? I know you hate it when kids — teens — are involved."

He took the comfortable lie handed to him. "Partly, I guess."

"You didn't have to resign, though. You could have transferred to another division. You could have —"

He hadn't want to bring this up long distance, but he couldn't lie either. "The thing is...I'm moving out of state."

The silence was so abrupt and so profound, Keir thought they'd been disconnected.

"Rick?"

"You're leaving the...state?" Rick sounded dazed.

"I am. Yeah."

"I don't understand."

It was difficult, but Keir said it. "Yes, you do."

Another trans-Atlantic silence stretched.

Finally, harshly, Rick said, "What? Is this like some kind of ultimatum?"

"Come on, Monaghan. You know me better than that."

"I don't know you at all."

Rick disconnected the call.

Half an hour to departure; he had just enough time to run downstairs and grab something for breakfast if he moved fast. A piece of smoked ham — the Irish version of bacon — or one of those funky "puddings." He put his suitcase in the hotel hallway so the bus driver could collect it with the others, and behind him the phone began to ring. Loud, insistent...American. Keir plunged back into the room and leaped across the bed to grab it.

"Yep?"

"Two Irish cops walk out of a pub," Rick's voice announced.

Keir gave a half-laugh.

"Hey! It could happen!"

Keir caught a glimpse of his expression in the mirror over the desk. His smile faded; that was just sad. "To what do I owe this honor?"

"I don't know. Look, we're friends, right? Whatever else happens?"

"Of course."

"Okay. Just wanted to make sure."

Now how weird was it to get choked up over this? Very. "We're good," Keir said.

"Good? We're the best." Rick added awkwardly, "I feel like I did all the talking last night."

Keir did laugh then. His gaze fell on the bedside clock. "Hey, I've got to go. We're catching a ferry to this island."

"What island?"

"Inishbofin. The Island of the White Cow. It's off the west coast of Galway."

"As in home of the Inishbofin Ceili Band?"

"Right." Irish music, mountain climbing, Truth, Justice and the American Way. Just a few of the things they'd had — still had — in common. Too bad it wasn't enough. Keir said, "I'll send you a postcard."

"I probably won't get it till you're back."

Hell, he probably wouldn't get it till after Keir was gone.

They both silently absorbed that. Keir said, "Well, it's not a secret. I wish you were here."

The pause that followed was excruciating. Finally, haltingly, Rick said, "Keir —"

It was just too hard to hear it.

"Later," Keir said, and put the receiver down.

Chapter Three

Deanna Holland was a little woman with a big gun. Not that you'd know it to look at her. Polite, quiet, well-groomed. Even as they ran out of suspects in her boyfriend's homicide, they'd treated her politely and respectfully. They didn't meet a lot of Deanna Holland's in their business.

They didn't have enough to arrest her, but Deanna didn't know that, and the third time they'd interviewed her in her Sherman Oaks she'd freaked and pulled a Ruger Rimfire out of an expensive Chinese vase.

Keir had been faster, going for her before Rick was even on his feet. Rick heard the shot as Keir jerked. Rick's own heart seemed to stop — the world seemed to stop. It was like that scene in that Hitchcock film when the merry-go-round spins out of control and smashes apart. That's what it felt like. Like gravity had slipped and he'd just gone hurtling into black space, and the earth was a blasted, empty shell falling in pieces around him.

Game over. Everything over.

But then Keir had still been on his feet, and he had the gun, and Deanna was shrieking like a banshee, pouring out her rage and terror. Keir was unharmed beyond powder burns on his neck and sports jacket. He'd been mad as hell about that jacket, which had been new.

That night the sex was phenomenal. It was always good — they were getting to know each other very well that way by then. Knew exactly what turned the other one on, what felt great — well, what didn't feel great? And the funny thing was how new fucking seemed when they tried it together. Yeah, it was always good, but that night...

But later Rick had made a fool of himself. Said things he should never have said, wrapping Keir in his arms and spilling his guts. Luckily Keir had slept through most of it. Not much for afterplay, Keir. He lived on his nerves too much, and when he let go...but Rick sort of liked the fact that he was one of the few people Keir could let his guard down with.

By the time morning rolled around, though, Rick'd had plenty of time to reflect on what a bad idea it had been to get this involved. They were already about as close as two guys could be — sex was really just confusing things. Rick didn't want to feel any more than he did, and, God help him, he didn't ever want to feel what he'd felt when he heard Deanna Holland's gun go off.

So he'd told Keir — they were always honest with each other. Keir seemed to take it all right. Better than Rick expected. In fact, if Rick were completely honest, he'd been a little irritated at how well Keir had seemed to take it. Okay, granted it was a little...quiet between them for a time. Each of them trying not to set the other off or send the wrong message. But then it gradually fell back to the way it had been before. It was good. It was safe.

And then, out of the blue, Keir had sprung this resignation bullshit.

Rick stood in the shower the morning after his phone call to Ireland. He dealt efficiently with the hard-on he'd woken with — thanks to painfully vivid dreams about his partner. His soon to be ex-partner. Then he quickly soaped up and rinsed down.

It was weird how much he missed Keir already.

Why couldn't Keir at least have talked it over with him? Not that he'd have been able to convince him to change his mind — there was no more stubborn sonofabitch than Keiran Quinn once he made his mind up.

Rick toweled off rapidly. He was running late, having overslept when he did finally manage to drop off. The news that Keir was moving — leaving the state had shaken him badly. It just kept getting worse and worse. Every time he managed to convince himself that he could deal with one piece of the puzzle Keir had become — like staying friends even if Keir wasn't on the job with him — he spotted a new tidal wave-sized wrinkle headed his way.

The leaving the state thing...that was the worst so far.

There was no going back from that. It was possible Rick might never see Keir again.

He'd already had a week of what that tasted like, and rat poison would be sweet by comparison.

But what was the solution?

There wasn't one.

He looked at the clock in his bedroom and swore. If Keir had been here picking him up for work like the bastard was supposed to, Rick wouldn't be running late — for the first time in God knew when.

He buttoned his shirt, zipped his pants. He reached for his shoulder holster and was hit by the memory of the last time Keir had been in this room, stretched out long and brown and lazy in the sheets of the unmade bed. Keir grinning up at him, alive and in one piece. Keir reaching for him...

These were the memories he didn't want. But it was all tangled together now. The man who stood shoulder to shoulder with him on the job and the man who lay in his arms at night. When Keir went he would take both those men with him — he would take everything. And wasn't this exactly what Rick had been afraid of?

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The island made up for the rest of the trip. Not that the trip had been bad, but...Inishbofin was the real deal. From the blow holes and sea stacks to the ruined pirate fort...there was plenty to see, plenty to explore. He could be by himself as much as he liked — and he liked. Keir hiked out to the seal colony, walked the beaches, climbed in the green hills. The water around the island was supposed to be some of the clearest in Ireland, and he could have

gone swimming or diving if he'd felt more energetic. He slept well on the island. The best he'd slept in a long time. He ate well too — he liked seafood, and the Doonmore Hotel had a good chef.

On the third and last evening of the island stay, Keir sat on a rock overlooking a pasture with gentle-faced cows, and knew himself to be truly at peace for the first time in a very long time. For the first time he felt at peace with the decision he'd made to leave LAPD — and Rick.

It wasn't easy, it still hurt, but here on the island he had a sense of the...ebb and flow of all things. Sometimes you won, sometimes you lost, but life went on — and he would be happy again one day. He knew it for certain sitting under the setting Irish sun listening to a corncrake tuning up for the evening's serenade.

When he finally walked back to the hotel it was nearly dark. Several guests from the tour were sitting on the green overlooking the ocean and listening to a local group of musicians. A brown-haired girl was singing "Danny Boy" while the others accompanied her on an assortment of guitars, fiddles, penny whistles. It had to be a request from the American tourists, but Keir thought he'd never heard a sweeter version.

The summer's gone, and all the flowers are dying
'Tis you, 'tis you must go and I must bide.
But come ye back when summer's in the meadow
Or when the valley's hushed and white with snow
'Tis I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow
Oh Danny boy, oh Danny boy, I love you so.

He'd always thought it a trite little song — fake Irish — but that evening with the rush of waves and cries of the seabirds for added accompaniment — his throat tightened at the simple sweetness of the melody and words. Nothing wrong with a little sincere sentiment, was there? He felt an unexpected sense of the merging past and the present...his own Irish roots and the adventuring spirit of his ancestors that had led them to strike out for a new land and leave this tough, enduring loveliness behind.

He was probably never going to hear "Danny Boy" again without getting choked up. Rick would laugh his ass off.

And he remembered that soon Rick would be a memory too...like this evening, like this island. Except that Rick would be the most important of all his memories.

Or maybe not. He might get over it one day. But right now it felt like a grief that would never heal. Even if the ending had been written at the outset. God knows he should have seen it

coming. Should have guarded his heart. When had any of Rick's relationships lasted more than a few months? When had his?

He just...hadn't had a choice in it. He'd pretty much loved Rick from the start.

In sunshine or in shadow.

The music was breaking up, people wandering back to homes and hotels to get ready for the night's festivities. There was music on the island nearly every night during the summer.

Keir headed for his hotel.

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After a very nice seafood dinner with the tour group — even the lobster tasted different in Ireland — there was an evening concert in the hotel rec room, and immediately following the traditional music concert, there was an informal ceili in the hotel pub. With the exception of the tour group, everyone in the place — which was packed — seemed to play an instrument or sing. There was a great deal of Emmy Lou Harris and country western in addition to traditional Irish fare.

Keir was at the bar getting another round for himself and the couple from Milwaukee — Ceil and Kris — when he caught the eye of the bartender.

As in...a blip suddenly flashed on the old gaydar. Keir had already noticed the bartender — Seamus, they called him — a very nice looking young guy with curly reddish hair and brown eyes, an easy smile and a nice laugh. About as different from Rick's tall, dark and handsome good looks as it got.

"Another one for you?" Seamus asked. Somehow his accent made it sound especially charming.

Keir nodded, reaching for his wallet. When he glanced up, Seamus was eyeing him. Catching Keir's gaze, he grinned.

"You're the copper, are you?"

Keir winced and Seamus laughed.

"I asked about you," Seamus admitted. And Keir started paying closer attention. "What do you think of our island, then?"

"Beautiful." Keir was horrible at small talk, but he tried. "Have you lived here all your life?"

Seamus laughed. "I was a stockbroker in Dublin. Decided to leave the rat race and came here. Used to holiday here in the old days."

"Must be a change."

"Change would be a fine thing." Seamus counted out Keir's coins and winked.

Was that a pun or —? Keir said slowly, "Isn't the saying, 'Chance would be a fine thing?'"

"Aye, but this...change could happen." Seamus was still smiling, but his gaze met Keir's steadily, unmistakably.

Keir swallowed. "What time do you get off?"

Seamus's grin was wry. "Depends on the seishun." He nodded at the packed house of musicians and singers and tourists. "This lot...could be two or three in the morning." He added, "But your boat's not leaving until eleven-thirty tomorrow."

Bemused, Keir carried the drinks back to the little table where Ceil and Kris sat.

"Making friends?" Ceil asked, and Kris chuckled.

One of the tour group requested "Danny Boy," and the island musicians obligingly launched into a long instrumental version. The tour group began to sing — not very well.

"'Tis you, 'tis you must go and I must bide...."

Kris put her hands to her head in pain.

The pub door swung open on a newcomer. A gust of fresh sea breeze wafted through the crush.

"But come ye baaaaaaaaack when summer's in the meadow..." roared the singers.

It was like in a film where a long distance shot suddenly snapped into zoom focus. Rick — Rick — filled the doorway, the night breeze ruffling his dark hair, his eyes raking the crowded room.

"Wow," Kris said. "James Bond just arrived."

"I...don't...believe it," Keir said.

His friends glanced at him, then turned back to the newcomer. That was the last Keir noticed about the ladies from Milwaukee. He stood up. Rick's eyes met his.

It seemed to Keir that he waited a long time to see that particular expression on Rick's face. Maybe five years. Maybe his entire life.

Rick started to make his way through the gridlock of chairs and bodies and musical instruments. Keir moved to meet him. It felt like it took a long time, and then they were face to face, fingers brushing tentatively — and then locking on, gripping tightly.

"What are you doing here?" Keir asked.

Rick started to laugh. "I think that's my line."

"You couldn't have just arrived. When did you get to the island?"

"Three this afternoon. It took me awhile to track you down."

"Some detective."

"For your information, this island is five miles long, has five villages, five bed and breakfasts — and three hotels. Although if you blink, you're liable to miss any or all of them." Rick leaned forward and Keir realized they were about to share their first public kiss. That was his last clear thought for several long seconds.

Warm mouth and faded aftershave. Rick needed a shave and a shower, but to Keir he smelled like...bright sunshine and gun oil and L.A. rain and the wind blowing through the

open car window and the glint of sunglasses and the flash of badge and too many burgers and too many beers and talking late into the night and sheepish grins in the morning...and being held tight and told you were the one thing that really mattered — the only thing that mattered — from the one person you felt the same way about.

When they broke apart there was clapping, some laughs and a couple of whoops. It was okay. They were among friends.

Rick was looking around the pub. Keir looked too — no sign of Seamus behind the bar. He felt a twinge of regret. Not for himself. For Seamus. It must get lonely for a gay man on a little island in the middle of nowhere.

Rick said, "Is there some place we can go and talk?"

"You want to talk?" Keir raised an eyebrow. "I never thought I'd see the day."

"Nah, I want to tell you this joke I heard."

Keir nodded, patient. "Shoot."

"Two Irish cops walk into a bar. The first cop says..." Rick's voice dropped. He said gruffly, "I love you. Come home."

Keir managed to keep his voice steady. "What's the other cop say?"

The sweetness of Rick's smile was like a kick in his chest. "That's what I'm here to find out, boyo."